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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 007878

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

FROM REGIONAL REFUGEE COORDINATOR
DEPT FOR PRM/A WHITNEY REITZ, PRM/ANE WILLIAM LEHMBERG
ISLAMABAD AND KABUL FOR REFCOORDS
ROME FOR DHS/CIS
GENEVA FOR RMA

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PA](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: PAKISTAN - GROWING NEED FOR REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

This message has been cleared by Embassy Islamabad

Summary

1. (SBU) The Cairo-based Regional Refugee Coordinator (for resettlement) joined with the Islamabad Refugee Coordinator and the Regional Director of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) from October 3-8 to review the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program (USRP) in Pakistan. They visited Islamabad, Peshawar and Karachi meeting with local offices of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with NGOs and with the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

2. (SBU) RefCoords concur with the UNHCR assessment that it should be possible to develop a significant resettlement caseload of Afghans in Pakistan towards the end of FY 2006 once the repatriation effort now under way has run its course and the proposed registration exercise has been completed. In the short term we can expect greater collaboration between UNHCR and NGOs to produce increased referrals of vulnerable Afghan cases, of Somalis, and some Iranians. We agreed with UNHCR Peshawar to review a group of Afghan Tajiks for possible resettlement and encouraged Focus to work with us to identify suitable vulnerable candidates from the Afghan Ismailis in Karachi. UNHCR and NGOs welcomed our proposal to hold a U.S. resettlement workshop later in the year. RefCoords also looked at the possibility of processing Iranian religious minorities in Islamabad. End summary.

Significant Numbers in the Past

3. (SBU) Cairo-based Regional Refugee Coordinator Cheyne joined with Islamabad RefCoord Summers from October 3-8 to review the likely refugee resettlement caseload in Pakistan. Kevin Quigley, Regional Director for ICMC Istanbul, accompanied RefCoords. ICMC is our refugee-processing partner for Pakistan.

4. (SBU) The USRP, working with ICMC, resettled significant numbers of Afghans and other nationalities from Pakistan prior to 9/11. With the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the focus inevitably shifted to repatriation and resettlement numbers dropped significantly. The USRP subsequently downsized its processing operation in Pakistan accordingly although ICMC maintained a small sub-office in Islamabad to deal with a continuing but somewhat smaller caseload.

5. (SBU) Cheyne and Quigley visited Islamabad and Peshawar earlier in the year (March) to review the caseload and to evaluate the scope for increasing the numbers from Pakistan. It was felt that despite efforts to repatriate the many Afghans in the country there should be significant numbers of residual cases who would never return and for whom third country resettlement would be the only realistic solution. UNHCR subsequently suggested a follow-up visit in October (after the census of Afghans in Pakistan) to review the situation, to estimate a realistic caseload, and to work with UNHCR to increase referrals accordingly. RefCoords met with UNHCR offices in Islamabad, Peshawar and Karachi. They also met with the Embassy's DHS officer, with NGOs, and with the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Misconceptions About the US Program

6. (SBU) The timing of the visit was opportune since UNHCR had recently taken on two new key staff members, Senior Protection Officer, Beat Schuler, and Resettlement Officer, Laura Almirall. In talks with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and other NGOs we found that the previous UNHCR protection staff had been reluctant to increase

referrals to the USRP because they had assumed that the U.S. program was hopelessly stalled with the augmented security screening procedures introduced after 9/11. This attitude had gained some currency in the refugee community in Pakistan and cases that would have been suitable for the USRP, were instead being diverted to the Canadian and Australian programs.

17. (SBU) We were able to clarify the situation noting that the U.S. process was now predictable and should be relatively prompt with the presence of a full time DHS officer in Islamabad and the maximum time taken for most SAO clearances now reduced to around 35-40 days. The U.S. program could process refugees as fast as, if not faster than any other resettlement country. This struck a responsive chord with the new staff at UNHCR in Islamabad and with its sub-office in Peshawar and with the NGOs who now seem more positive and more enthusiastic about the prospect of working more closely with the USRP.

Resettlement of Vulnerable Cases Need Not Undermine
Repatriation

18. (SBU) It was agreed that while the main focus should continue to be on repatriation, there was considerable scope for building up third country resettlement as a solution for the most vulnerable cases in such a way that did not undermine repatriation efforts. The Peshawar sub-office of UNHCR alone anticipates that it will refer 40 cases (200 individuals) to the US before the end of calendar 2005 and a further caseload of around 150 (500-600 individuals) during CY 2006. Additional caseloads should also be forthcoming from Islamabad, Quetta and Karachi. UNHCR undertook to collaborate more with NGOs to identify vulnerable cases for referral to the USRP. UNHCR will reach out to NGOs in the future requesting candidates for possible resettlement. IRC was particularly receptive to the idea of identifying suitable resettlement candidates from its work with vulnerable cases in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). Most of the referrals in the short term will be extremely vulnerable Afghan cases, e.g., women at risk, single women heads of household etc., in addition to a number of Iraqi, Iranian and Somali cases.

Possible Group Referral - Afghan Tajiks

19. (SBU) We also discussed with UNHCR Peshawar a possible group submission of 130 Afghan Tajik families currently in the NWFP. UNHCR believes this group will be unable to return to Afghanistan.

USRP Workshop for NGOs and UNHCR

110. (SBU) We discussed the possibility of organizing a USRP resettlement training workshop for NGOs and UNHCR offices to build on their renewed enthusiasm for working with the U.S. program. It was felt that such a workshop would be useful to educate caseworkers and protection officers about USRP criteria and procedures and to resolve any concerns they might have about the USRP. UNHCR and IRC welcomed the idea and we will work with ICMC to organize a workshop in Islamabad (and possibly Peshawar) in November or December.

Afghan Ismailis

111. (SBU) We met with Focus (part of the Agha Khan Foundation), the NGO that has assumed responsibility for the care and protection of the few thousand Afghan Ismailis in Pakistan - most of them in Karachi. During the March visit Focus had expressed interest in developing a pilot program of referrals of Ismaili vulnerable cases (women-at-risk, single women heads of household etc). Focus had since retreated from this proposal following UNHCR advice that the U.S. resettlement program took too long. Focus was happy to receive our assurance that the U.S. program was fully functional and ready to work with the organization to resettle eligible case - in a way that did not undermine the organization's efforts to repatriate the majority of the Ismailis in Pakistan. The Executive Officer of Focus Pakistan, Karim Nayani offered to put this to a Focus board meeting to be held in Nairobi on October 7

Iranian Religious Minorities

112. (SBU) During the visit we also discussed the possibility of using ICMC Pakistan to process Iranian religious

minorities for resettlement. We will discuss this further
with PRM/A.

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